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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG AND SE NATSIOS

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SUBJECT: SUDAN - NUBIAN VIEWS ON NILE DAM PROJECTS

REF: SECSTATE 56709

1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Poloffs met with two representatives of the Nubian Popular Committee, Dr. Sabbar and Mr. Faisal Barry, on May 1. Discussions confirmed that the Nubian community in Northern Sudan continues to oppose Government of Sudan intentions to construct two additional dams along the Nile River to the detriment of the resident Nubian population as well as ancient Nubian artifacts and culture. Recent demonstrations against these projects have turned violent and have been documented in local press, but poloffs assess that the claims of 15,000 to 20,000 attendees and the use of army units and helicopters at these mid-April demonstrations are exaggerated. Nonetheless, the GOS activities opposed by the Nubians are a legitimate concern for human rights, cultural, and archeological reasons. Work on one of the dams, Kajbar, had been suspended as a result of recent demonstrations, but on May 8, Northern State authorities announced that work will resume. End Summary and Comment.

2. (SBU) Two representatives of the Nubian Popular Committee, Dr. Sabbar and Mr. Faisal Barry, met with Political officers on May 1. They provided an historical overview of the situation in the Nubian area of northern Sudan. The Aswan Dam project in Egypt, completed in the 1960's, introduced a significant threat to the native Nubian culture along the Nile River and encouraged significant archeological activity in that region by international experts. New plans by the government in Khartoum to construct two more dams along the Nile north of Khartoum, as explained by Dr. Sabbar and Mr. Faisal, present identical threats to Nubian culture and spawn the same Nubian opposition. The Kajbar Dam project located on the Nile between Merowe and the Egyptian border will be the first of the two to be constructed. The Dahl dam project located at the top of Lake Nasir, in the far north of Sudan, will begin after the completion of Kajbar. Construction of these two additional dams would leave submerged nearly the entire traditional homeland of the Nubian people, according to Dr. Sabbar. Preliminary work started on Kajbar, but was halted in April 2007 due to demonstrations by local residents. On May 8, newspapers reported that work will soon resume.

3. (SBU) President Bashir has appointed a special directorate to oversee implementation and development of these dam projects, according to Sabbar and Faisal. This directorate reports to the President personally with no outside oversight and operates with his full authority. According to the two Nubian representatives, it is a separate entity from the Ministry of Irrigation, which would be expected to have oversight of dam projects. This directorate has employed the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) at previous Nubian demonstrations to violently obstruct the demonstrators, according to Sabbar and Faisal. The Nubian

movement against the construction of these dams and the groups associated with it are all peaceful, according to Sabbar and Faisal.

¶4. (SBU) Dr. Sabbar said that the Nubian movement has not attempted to take legal action against the Khartoum government to prevent these dam projects from going forward and has made minimal attempts to engage the international community to address the issue. Sabbar conceded that the international community is otherwise occupied with many problems in Sudan, but observed that the government's intent to displace and effectively obliterate Nubian culture through the destruction of these areas was tantamount to ethnic cleansing in his opinion, however peaceably it might occur.

¶5. (U) Under treaties dating from 1929 and 1959, Egypt has a say in the construction of new dams on the Nile in Sudan. Dr. Sabbar said that Egypt is willing to allow the construction of the two additional dams because they will furnish irrigation water to Egyptian farmers. Sabbar insisted that Nubians dislocated by the construction of the new dams would not be allowed to resettle in the areas of new irrigation.

¶6. (SBU) Dr. Sabbar claimed that the construction of the two dams would cause the dislocation of 74,000 Nubians. He said further that he is convinced that the Khartoum government would not compensate those dislocated. Populations of Nubians displaced from previous dam construction have not been compensated, he stated, but rather have been moved to areas where they are under threat of being assimilated into the Arabic speaking population.

¶7. (SBU) The two representatives claimed that 15,000 to 20,000 Nubians demonstrated against the Kajbar dam project in April. They stated that three Nubians had been injured by the police in the course of the demonstration. When pressed, they confirmed that the population of the villages in the area is only in the range of 3,000 to 4,000. But they said that buses had been organized to bring Nubians in from Khartoum. When asked who had paid for the buses, food and accommodation, they replied that the people involved had paid themselves.

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